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Testimony of: Victor De La Paz
In support of: SB 1195

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Honorable Co-Chairs Harp and Walker, members of the committee, my name is Victor De La Paz and I am the Deputy Chief Financial Officer for Hartford Public Schools. I'm here today to testify in support of SB 1195, An Act Concerning School Finance Reform.

SB 1195 is a very comprehensive bill that includes a number of technical processes for changing the state's approach to education funding. But in the end it's important to remember that this bill simply focuses our school funding system on the needs of individual students. This is something Hartford Public Schools has been doing for over three years under Student Based Budgeting, and is a central concept underlying our reform. Another aspect of the reform in Hartford is School Choice, and those two elements – Student Based Budgeting and School Choice – complement each other intentionally. This focus on school choice in SB 1195 should not be understated, as it gives families who do not typically have a school option outside of their neighborhood, the life-changing chance to send their children to a better public school irrespective of where they live.

Instead of focusing on many of the calculations in this bill, I'd like to focus your attention to three of its key virtues, some of which are clearly enhancements over our broken ECS formula. First, it calls for the resources for students with high needs to follow that student to the receiving district. A very important detail in this proposal is that it calls for the state to deduct any amounts that do not follow the student from the sending district's per pupil allocation. In Hartford we have historically had disputes with other districts

around reimbursement for services provided for non-resident students. This enhancement would take us out of the collections business and the removal of such an administrative distraction would allow for more inter-district collaboration.

Second and related, this proposal aims to simplify the education funding formula by consolidating many funding streams into one. This would have the beneficial effect of ending the harmful double-funding of the same student that occurs so often today. For example, HPS has about 3,000 suburban students arrive at our magnet schools daily. Their home districts are receiving ECS for their residency status, but in addition we are receiving magnet revenue for those students. In hundreds of cases, students with no special needs are generating costs of over \$20K to Connecticut's taxpayers. That kind of double-funding is simply bad business practice and the result of an inability to make difficult decisions at the state level.

Finally, I want to reiterate that this bill is comprehensive and thoughtful. It calls for a two-year phase-in period where a high-quality study would determine the pivotal foundation amount for the formula. Only in year three (2014) would any district be impacted, with gaining districts ramping up over 7 years and districts that would receive less state funding getting the benefit of a 10 year phase in period. This measured and thoughtful pace should allay the fears of some districts that believe the impact to their budgets will be significant. To be clear, HPS does not have a crystal ball and cannot predict whether the district's budget will suffer from such a change in education funding. But our commitment to funding students' individual needs and our core belief that good schools make a real difference in student's lives embolden our position that fixing the state's education funding formula is the right thing for our students and families.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on these important issues and we ask that you support Senate Bill 1195.